

# **The Story of the Short Ballot Cities**

**An Explanation of the Success**

**of the**

**COMMISSION FORM  
of Municipal Government**

**(Revised Edition)**

**MARCH, 1914**

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**The National Short Ballot Organization**

**383 Fourth Avenue, New York**

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# The Story of the Short Ballot Cities

By RICHARD S. CHILDS

A PEACEFUL revolution!

Three hundred cities have swept away boards of aldermen, mayors and a host of minor officials and have set up new municipal governments on a plan so simple that it needs no boss to direct it!

The whole nation looks on with amazed enthusiasm while the people in these towns not only get control over their government, but keep it, election after election! Scores of the other remaining American cities have their groups of men who are enthusiastically organizing some endeavor to secure the commission form of government for their town.

## WHAT THE "COMMISSION FORM" IS

THE spread of this movement was begun entirely by accident. Galveston, Tex., after the great flood of 1900 was practically wiped out. So much progressive and constructive work was demanded of the city government that the old system of a board of aldermen and the usual string of independent elective officers broke down. A group of business men petitioned the state government to suspend the local government and replace it temporarily with a commission of five men. This was done, and the whole city was put under the control of five men, three of whom were appointees of the governor. This was where the term "commission" originated,

and the name, for want of a better description, stuck to it ever since, although the board is no longer a "commission" in the true sense of the word at all.

This commission in Galveston was able to make decisions and get things accomplished in half the time that it took the old board of aldermen to pass a resolution referred to a committee. The commission planned and built a sea wall to protect the city against further floods, raised the ground level of a large part of the town, got the city government running again at one-third less annual cost, made a number of important improvements and at the same time reduced the debt and the tax rate.

After two years, during which the politicians were finding precious little to do, the commission was made entirely elective by popular vote, much to the dismay of many good persons in the town, who feared that the politicians would elect old-style officials and restore the old-time inefficiency and bad rule. Their fears, however, proved groundless, for the people proceeded to elect the same commissioners and have continued to do it at every election since. Except by death there have been only two changes in the personnel of the commission since the beginning.

Galveston's claim that it was the best governed city in the United States made Houston jealous, and after a few years this city petitioned for a similar government and was granted it. Dallas, Denison, Austin and almost all the principal neighboring cities in Texas have since then followed suit.

A few years after Galveston first began to attract attention some civic workers in Des Moines began to study the subject of popular government in fundamental fashion. They devised what has since become known as the "Des Moines plan," which is simply the commission form of government, with certain interesting additions, known as the initiative, referendum, recall and non-partisan primary. By the terms of the initiative provision a petition may be presented to the commission signed by a certain number of people demanding the passage of a certain ordinance, and if the commission sees fit to refuse the request the matter must be settled by popular vote. By the referendum provision ordinances can be held up by

protest signed by a certain number of citizens and must then be rescinded by the commission or approved by popular vote. By the terms of the recall provision, the presentation of a petition containing a certain number of signatures may force any member of the commission to submit the question of his continuance in office to a new election immediately. The non-partisan primary is simply an eliminating election. All candidates are nominated by petition (no party labels), and the leading ten remain on the ballot for the final election.

The publicity attendant on the installation of the new government in Des Moines gave the movement new stimulus throughout the country, and it began to be known as the latest and most up-to-date thing in city government. Many towns adopted it from a mere desire to be abreast of the times and to show the world that they were progressive and enterprising. In some cases the plan met with vigorous opposition, sometimes with a complete lack of interest, while in some cities it carried by an overwhelming vote.

## THE "CITY-MANAGER" VARIATION.

THE most important variation from the original Galveston-Des Moines type of commission government is the so-called "city-manager" plan. Under this system the elected commissioners are simply a board of directors; they do not, individually or collectively, concern themselves with departmental detail, as is the case under the older type. That function they leave to an appointive chief executive who is known as the city manager. This official is expected to be an expert and need not be a resident of the city at the time of his appointment.

On behalf of this plan its proponents claim that the council is a more truly representative body than is possible under the Des Moines plan, first because it is not necessary for its members to neglect their private affairs to take part in the running of the city, and second, because it will make it possible for men to become members of the council, who would make excellent representatives but poor managers.

This plan has been adopted in Sumter, S. C., Dayton and Springfield, O., Hickory and Morgantown, W. Va., La Grande, Ore., and Phoenix, Ariz.

## THE SUCCESS OF THE COMMISSION PLAN

**I**T is no easy matter to prove conclusively and in a true scientific fashion that one city is better governed than another.

It is absolutely futile, for example, to compare the tax rates in different cities, for there is no uniformity in the methods of assessments. Even the variations of rate in the same city are misleading, for it often happens that under commission government the people are willing to trust their representatives with larger undertakings. Sometimes, too, the old government leaves a heritage of unpaid debts which makes the first year of operation under the new plan more expensive than if it had started out with a clean slate.

Nevertheless despite the difficulty of making comparisons, there is nothing more certain than the fact that whether the commission form of government is the ideal form or not, it is better than the forms of government which preceded it in the various cities.

Never in our political history has any phenomenon of this nature been examined with such minuteness or by so many investigators. The officials of commission governed cities have been bombarded with questions by mail to such an extent that it has frequently been impossible for them to answer the correspondence. Delegation after delegation has visited these cities and has made the rounds of city offices, newspaper rooms, civic organizations and political clubs, as well as interviewed the business men, to ascertain the truth. Many of these delegations were predisposed against the new plan and were intent on finding flaws in it that would justify their taking home a hostile report. Magazine writers have made exhaustive inquiries, and such organizations as the National Municipal League, the National Short Ballot Organization, and other civic bodies have kept watch very carefully. While the Boston finance commission was planning the new Boston charter, President Eliot of Harvard made a tour of the com-

nissioned governed cities, or "short ballot cities" as he prefers to call them and returned to Boston so enthusiastic that he was able to win over the town to an acceptance of some of the fundamental features of the plan. Another elaborate inquiry was made by a committee of the state legislature of Illinois, from which everybody expected a hostile report. The committee, however, reported strongly in favor of the plan, stating that everywhere they found that it had won the approval of the people who lived under it.

Unquestionably the plan is popular wherever tried and spreads with most rapidity among the nearby cities which have the best opportunity for intimate observation of its operation. In every one of these cities there had been waste, some corruption and much inefficiency. In all of them party machines have been in complete control and had been maintained in running order at the public expense through political favoritism in the making of appointments. How much the "gangs" cost the cities was revealed when the government passed into the hands of men who having obtained office without the help of the "gangs," could afford to ignore them.

More remarkable than the fact that nearly every one of these cities has bettered its financial condition—the surest proof of efficiency—is the fact that in no commissioned governed city has there yet been reported a single serious allegation of graft. Any instance of graft, whether proved or merely alleged, would have been seized upon triumphantly by the enemies of this type of government and magnified and exploited to the utmost.

Significant also is the fact that no city has ever gone back to the old plan, though the opponents of commission government have made attempts to secure its abandonment in several places.

Thus far the objections to commission government have been mainly theoretical. Typical of these is the assertion that the plan is "Un-American." Yes, thank heaven! A city government in which graft is not even suspected is decidedly un-American! It looks like the splendidly administered cities of Europe. The sooner we can Americanize this un-American thing the better!

## WHY THE COMMISSION PLAN SUCCEEDS

HERE have been many explanations offered for the undoubted relative successes of the commission plan. The abolition of the wards, for example, is frequently quoted as ample reason for the relative success of the new plan. There are many cities in the United States, however, in which there are no wards, and they have never attracted attention by the superior efficiency. Galveston had no wards before the flood, her city council being elected at large.

Most of the explanations are only half true, because they involve a study only of the internal mechanism of the government, whereas the real difference between the old and the new comes at the point of contact between the government and the people.

The secret of the success of the plan lies in the fact that the governmental power is taken out of obscurities and placed upon a pinnacle of light where all the citizens can watch it.

No mere form of government will automatically produce *good* government. But forms *can* be devised that will automatically give *popular* government. The people's will can be baffled or facilitated by the form of government. The people's work at the polls can be made obscure, complex and difficult. Or it can be made clear, simple and easy. Under the commission plan with its short ballot, the people's work is very clear, very simple, very easy! And that is all the secret there is to the success of the plan!

In our old-fashioned city governments we have committed two serious errors.

First, we have scattered the powers of government among so *many* officials that it is quite impossible for the people to watch and control them all.

Second, we have subdivided the power in such small fragments that no single part is really worth watching. A member of the city council, for instance, under the old form of government, has so little power that it is really not worth while for the people of the town to become agitated over the question of who shall get the job.

The typical old-style city government of this

country consists of a mayor, with fairly large power, a string of minor administrative officials also chosen by popular vote and a council which sometimes consists of two legislative bodies. The feature of this plan is the scattering of power based on our ancient fear of kings. We have always had a superstitious dread of giving to any elected official power enough to do anything for us without getting the consent of several others. We have overlooked the fact that to make the former official obey our wishes we had also to exert simultaneous compulsion over the latter whose consent he needed, and that popular control thus became anything but the simple matter it ought to be. The politicians can always get their own way if they make the council large enough. A council of fifteen men might occasionally feel personally the pressure of public opinion, but triple the size of the council, and the individual members become so insignificant and publicity so subdivided that each member is safely "lost in the shuffle."

Those who promoted the idea of having a host of elective officials in the government have always taken it for granted that there was something democratic about this procedure. Democracy, however, does not consist in *electing* everybody, but in *controlling* everybody. The mayor's office boy, for instance, may be appointed by the mayor, or elected by popular vote. He is a public servant, but there is nothing democratic in electing him when he can just as well be appointed. The vital thing is that he shall be controlled by the people, and if he will be under better control through appointment than through election, it is more democratic to appoint him.

The commission plan of government is based on no false idea that the people want to elect every clerk. It gives the power to five men, who thereby become conspicuously responsible before all the people of the city. Each one of them is important enough to make it worth while for the citizens to inquire concerning his record and character. Each candidate for the office can attract a crowd to hear him speak, whereas an old-time councilman would have been utterly unable to get a hearing before the people. There are not so many commissioners but what every citizen can find out about all of them and vote in-

telligently on election day. There are not so many candidates as to cause a citizen to depend upon tickets put together for him by political specialists. Each citizen can and does make up his own ticket, and the function of the professional ticket-making machine thereby entirely disposed of.

If the commission were composed of ten men instead of five the list of names would be longer than the average citizen would be likely to remember for himself, and we should see a natural grouping of candidates and their election by groups instead of singly. Some "good government association" or some party machine, even on a non-partisan ballot, would be sure to advertise tickets for the guidance of the voters, and in accepting these tickets the people would be sharing their power with the ticket makers.

## THE SHORT BALLOT

**T**HE commission plan succeeds, therefore, because it puts the power where the people can see it.

The vital feature is not the method of organization, but the method of popular control. It is the ballot on election day which is unique. It is so short that every citizen knows what he is doing and is not relying on a party label or on the guidance of a politician. The "average man," "the man in the street," or the "plain people," whatever you choose to call them, are in complete control of the government. The short ballot has left no work for the politicians to do; the people arrange the whole matter directly with the candidates without the politician's help.

The politician is a specialist in citizenship, and in the commission governed cities citizenship is so simple that there is nothing to be a specialist in.

The most marked phenomenon of commission government has been the increased interest of the people in their city government. All eyes have been focussed on the city hall month after month without interruption. The acts of the commission are topics of conversation for the street car and the business men's luncheon. Criticism is plentiful, and—better yet—knowledge of the facts is widespread. The people of the city oversee the government.

The force of public opinion has been repeatedly illustrated in the commission governed cities. Few men, good or bad, would have the strength to resist popular demand when it is so intensely concentrated upon them. Each commissioner knows his responsibility for what is done, and knows that everybody else in town knows it too. Politicians of the average sort have been elected to office many times in commissioned governed cities, but their conspicuous responsibility has brought about a remarkable responsiveness to the opinion of the people.

The initiative, referendum and recall are considered important features of the plan by many people, but Galveston and Houston made a success of the commission plan before any of these features were thought of.

On the other hand, the alarmists have as yet no evidence as grounds for fear. In the short ballot cities these devices have rarely been used. "We are so conspicuous that we are very sensitive to the demands of public opinion," said a commissioner of one of the cities, "the people don't need to use the clubs."

## WHERE THE SHORT BALLOT CITIES WILL LEAD US

THE commission plan of city government is the first instance of a short ballot government in the United States since the advent of the so-called "Jacksonian" democracy when the doctrine of rotation in office and "to the victors belong the spoils" was responsible for creating the present multiplicity of elective offices. It is hardly to be doubted that admirers of the plan will come to the conclusion that the short ballot may just as well be adopted also in the counties and the states. In the federal government we already have the short ballot. We as a people control the government very much better when we elect a president and make him responsible for the 300,000 federal appointees than if we attempted to elect the federal judges, attorneys, marshals, postmasters, ambassadors, etc., by popular vote. It is easier for the people to elect one man and hold him responsible than to elect fifty men and hold them all responsible.

New Jersey has found in the course of certain experiments that to give the power of county management to a small commission works very much better than to scatter the power in the usual manner among a host of petty elective officials.

In the state governments there is wide variation. All the states have two-chambered legislatures and a governor elected by popular vote. In New Jersey there are no other elected officers on the state ticket, not even a lieutenant-governor, while in Ohio and Illinois there are long strings of state officers filled by popular vote. (New Jersey gets its long state ballot in another way. It elects its legislators at large by counties.) In California the jungle ballot has been recognized as a natural ambush and the Progressives have begun to mow it down and simplify politics by making petty officers, like "State Printer," appointive.

The simpler the battleground and the less like jungle it is, the more effective will be the fighting of those political amateurs we call the common people. Accordingly, it seems probable that as the advantage of the commission government in cities becomes increasingly apparent, we shall see steady progress made toward the simplification of state and county government, with a view to giving the people instruments there which they can more easily control.

The full application of the short ballot principle to state, county and city means the removal of all necessity for elaborate political machines. At present they are necessary. To beat one machine we must create another. The government could not go on without them. They have supplied a real deficiency in our governmental plan, filling a gap between the people and their public servants which had to be filled somehow. We have no right to curse the politicians, for they have been highly useful to us. Rather should we pity them! The politician has one of the hardest jobs in the world. In return for his service in applying the necessary cohesion to our ramshackle government and keeping our impractical form of democracy from collapsing altogether, we have forced him to make a catch-as-catch-can living, giving him small, insecure offices in the government, and bouncing him without ceremony or justice.

th every change of administration. We have put  
m in a position where he could acquire wealth by  
ving an easy conscience and could earn nothing  
t defeat and courtesy if he were honest. Con-  
dering the power he has had to do evil without  
tting caught at it, 't is astonishing that he has  
rved us no worse. Wi'h the coming of the short  
llot we shall see the end of his work. He is an  
xpert in citizenship, and on the short ballot basis  
ere is nothing to be expert in. Good-by, old friend!  
ou have contributed to our American life a unique  
pe, unknown elsewhere in the world—genial, pic-  
resque, human and useful—but the people are  
beginning to learn how to do without you, and in  
ays to come they will arrange their business directly  
ith the candidates without your friendly inter-  
mediation!

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*Additional copies of this pamphlet, not exceeding 50,  
will be furnished FREE for distribution. Larger quan-  
ties \$10 per thousand and pro rata.*

*Those who wish to go into the subject deeply should  
read the announcement of the "Digest of Short Ballot  
Charters" (p. 19).*

Citizens interested in promoting the Short Ballot  
Movement should enroll in The National Short  
Ballot Organization (see last page).

# LIST OF SHORT BALLOT CITIES

Corrected to March 26, 1914

(Cities in bold face type have the "city manager" plan)

## ALABAMA

	Population
Birmingham .....	132,685
Cordova .....	1,747
Hartselle .....	1,374
Huntsville .....	7,611
Mobile .....	51,521
Montgomery .....	38,136
Sheffield .....	4,865
Talladega .....	5,854
Tuscaloosa .....	8,407

## ARIZONA

<b>Phoenix</b> .....	<b>11,134</b>
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## ARKANSAS

<b>Fort Smith</b> .....	<b>23,975</b>
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## CALIFORNIA

Berkeley .....	40,434
Modesto .....	7,258
Monterey .....	4,923
Oakland .....	150,174
Pasadena .....	30,291
Sacramento .....	44,696
San Diego .....	39,578
San Luis Obispo.....	5,157
San Mateo .....	4,384
Santa Cruz .....	11,146
Stockton .....	23,253
Vallejo .....	11,340

## COLORADO

Colorado City .....	4,333
Colorado Springs....	29,078
Denver .....	213,381
Durango .....	4,686
Fort Collins .....	8,210
Grand Junction.....	7,754
<b>Montrose</b> .....	<b>3,252</b>

## FLORIDA

Orlando .....	3,894
Pensacola .....	22,982
St. Petersburg .....	4,127

## GEORGIA

Cartersville .....	4,067
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## IDAHO

Boise .....	17,358
Lewiston .....	6,043

## ILLINOIS

	Popula
Cairo .....	14,
Carbondale .....	5,
Clinton .....	5,
Decatur .....	31,
Dixon .....	7,
Elgin .....	25,
Forest Park .....	6,
Hamilton .....	1,
Harrisburg .....	5,
Harvey .....	5,
Hillsboro .....	7,
Jacksonville .....	15,
Kewanee .....	9,
Marseilles .....	3,
Moline .....	24,
Murphysboro .....	7,4
Ottawa .....	11,
Pekin .....	9,8
Rochelle .....	2,7
Rock Island .....	24,3
Springfield .....	51,6
Spring Valley .....	7,0
Waukegan .....	16,0

## IOWA

Burlington .....	24,3
Cedar Rapids .....	33,8
Des Moines .....	86,3
Fort Dodge .....	15,5
Keokuk .....	14,0
Marshalltown .....	13,3
Mason City .....	11,2
Ottumwa .....	22,0
Sioux City .....	47,82

## KANSAS

Abilene .....	4,11
Anthony .....	2,66
Arkansas City .....	7,50
Caldwell .....	2,20
Chanute .....	9,27
Cherryvale .....	4,30
Coffeyville .....	12,68
Council Grove .....	2,54
Dodge City .....	3,21
Emporia .....	9,05
Eureka .....	2,33
Garden City .....	3,17
Garnett .....	2,33
Girard .....	2,44
Great Bend .....	4,62

	Population
awatha	2,974
lton	2,842
tchinson	16,364
ependence	10,480
a	9,032
ction City	5,598
sas City	82,331
ngman	2,570
rrence	12,374
ivenworth	19,363
nhattan	5,722
arion	1,841
Pherson	3,546
odosha	2,872
wton	7,862
athe	3,272
awa	7,650
rsons	12,463
tsburg	14,755
att	3,302
betha	1,768
peka	43,684
chita	52,450
ellington	7,034

#### KENTUCKY

vington	53,270
xington	35,099
ewport	30,309
ducah	22,760

#### LOUISIANA

exandria	11,213
ton Rouge	14,897
nellsville	4,090
ammond	2,942
nnings	3,925
ake Charles	11,449
itchitoches	2,532
ew Iberia	7,499
ew Orleans	399,075
reveport	28,015

#### MAINE

ardiner	5,311
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#### MARYLAND

mberland	21,839
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#### MASSACHUSETTS

oucester	24,398
averhill	44,115
awrence	85,892
owell	106,294
nn	89,336
lem	43,697
unton	34,259

#### MICHIGAN

	Population
Battle Creek	25,267
Cadillac	8,375
Fremont	2,009
Harbor Beach	1,556
Manistee	12,381
Marquette	11,503
Monroe	6,893
Owosso	9,639
Port Huron	18,863
Pontiac	14,532
Saginaw	50,510
Traverse City	12,115
Wyandotte	8,287

#### MINNESOTA

Duluth	78,466
Eveleth	7,036
Faribault	19,001
Mankato	10,365
Morris	1,685
St. Paul	214,744

#### MISSISSIPPI

Clarksdale	4,079
Gulfport	6,386
Greenwood	5,836
Hattiesburg	11,733
Jackson	21,262
Laurel	8,465
Meridian	23,285
Vicksburg	20,814

#### MISSOURI

Joplin	32,073
West Plains	2,914

#### MONTANA

Missoula	12,869
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#### NEBRASKA

Beatrice	9,356
Lincoln	43,973
Nebraska City	5,488
Omaha	124,069

#### NEW JERSEY

Atlantic City	46,150
Beverly	2,140
Bordentown	4,250
Haddonfield	4,142
Hawthorne	3,440
Jersey City	267,779
Long Branch	13,298
Millville	12,451
Nutley	6,009
Ocean City	1,950
Passaic	54,773
Phillipsburg	13,903

	Population
Ridgefield Park.....	
Ridgewood .....	5,416
Trenton .....	96,815
Vineland .....	5,282
Wallington .....	3,448

#### NEW MEXICO

Las Vegas .....	3,719
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#### NEW YORK

Beacon .....	10,629
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#### NORTH CAROLINA

Greensboro .....	15,895
<b>Hickory</b> .....	<b>3,716</b>
High Point .....	9,529
<b>Morganton</b> .....	<b>2,712</b>
Raleigh .....	19,218
Wilmington .....	25,748

#### NORTH DAKOTA

Bismarck .....	5,443
Devil's Lake .....	5,157
Fargo .....	14,331
Mandan .....	3,873
Minot .....	6,188
Williston .....	3,124

#### OHIO

<b>Dayton</b> .....	<b>116,577</b>
Middletown .....	13,152
<b>Springfield</b> .....	<b>46,921</b>

#### OKLAHOMA

Ada .....	4,309
Ardmore .....	8,618
Bartlesville .....	6,181
Collinsville .....	1,324
Duncan .....	2,477
El Reno .....	7,872
Enid .....	13,799
Guthrie .....	11,654
Holdenville .....	2,296
Lawton .....	7,788
MacAlester .....	12,954
Miami .....	2,907
Muskogee .....	25,278
Oklahoma City .....	64,205
Omulgee .....	4,176
Purcell .....	2,740
Sapulpa .....	8,283
Tulsa .....	18,182
Wagoner .....	4,018

#### OREGON

Baker .....	6,680
<b>La Grande</b> .....	<b>4,843</b>
Portland .....	207,214

#### PENNSYLVANIA

	Popul
Allentown .....	5,
Altoona .....	5,
Beaver Falls .....	1,
Bradford .....	1,
Carbondale .....	1,
Chester .....	3,
Connellsville .....	1,
Corry .....	2,
Easton .....	28,
Erie .....	60,
Franklin .....	9,
Harrisburg .....	64,
Hazleton .....	25,
Johnstown .....	55,
Lebanon .....	19,
Lock Haven .....	7,
McKeesport .....	42,
Meadville .....	12,
New Castle .....	36,
Oil City .....	15,
Pittston .....	15,
Pottsville .....	16,
Reading .....	20,
South Bethlehem .....	96,
Titusville .....	19,
Wilkes-Barre .....	8,
Williamsport .....	67,
York .....	44,

#### SOUTH CAROLINA

Columbia .....	26,
Florence .....	7,
Orangeburg .....	5,
Spartanburg .....	17,
<b>Sumter</b> .....	<b>8,</b>

#### SOUTH DAKOTA

Aberdeen .....	10,
Canton .....	2,
Chamberlain .....	1,
Dell Rapids .....	1,
Huron .....	5,
Lead .....	8,
Madison .....	3,1,
Pierre .....	3,6,
Rapid City .....	3,8,
Sioux Falls .....	14,0,
Vermillion .....	2,1,
Watertown .....	7,0,
Yankton .....	3,7,

#### TENNESSEE

Bristol .....	7,1,
Chattanooga .....	44,6,
Knoxville .....	36,3,
Lebanon .....	3,6,
Memphis .....	131,1,
Springfield .....	2,0,

TEXAS		Population	Population	
marillo	.....	9,957	Everett .....	24,814
ansas Pass	.....	1,197	Hoquiam .....	8,171
ustin	.....	29,860	North Yakima .....	14,082
orpus Christi	.....	8,222	Spokane .....	104,402
allas	.....	92,104	Tacoma .....	83,743
enison	.....	15,632	Walla Walla .....	19,364
rt Worth	.....	73,302		
lveston	.....	36,981		
reenville	.....	8,850		
ouston	.....	78,800		
ennedy	.....	1,147		
arble Falls	.....	1,061		
arshall	.....	11,452		
cKinney	.....	4,714		
alestine	.....	10,297		
rt Arthur	.....	7,663		
rt Lavaca	.....	1,699		
an Antonio	.....	96,614		
UTAH				
Bogun	.....	7,522		
urray	.....	4,057		
gden	.....	25,580		
rovo	.....	8,829		
alt Lake City	.....	92,777		
WASHINGTON				
entralia	.....	7,311		
hehalis	.....	4,507		
Total Population	.....		7,611,649	

No. of cities, 318

# THE SHORT BALLOT PRINCIPLE

As Defined by

## THE

### NATIONAL SHORT BALLOT ORGANIZATION

THE dangerously great power of politicians in our country is not due to any peculiar civic indifference of the people, but rests on the fact that we are living under a form of democracy that is unworkable as to constitute in practice a pseudodemocracy. It is unworkable because:

First—It submits to popular election offices which are too unimportant to attract (or deserve) public attention, and,

Second—It submits to popular election so many offices at one time that many of them are inevitably crowded out from proper public attention, and,

Third—It submits to popular election so many offices at one time that the business of making up the elaborate tickets necessary at every election makes the political machine an indispensable instrument in electoral action.

Many officials, therefore, are elected without adequate public scrutiny, and owe their selection not to the people, but to the makers of the party ticket, who thus acquire an influence that is capable of grave abuse.

The "SHORT BALLOT" principle is:

First—that only those offices should be elective which are important enough to attract (and deserve) public examination.

Second—that very few offices should be filled by election at one time, so as to permit adequate and unconfused public examination of the candidates.

Obedience to these fundamental principles explains the comparative success of democratic government in the cities of Great Britain and other foreign democracies, as well as in Galveston, Des Moines and other American cities that are governed by "Commissions."

The application of these principles should be extended to all cities, counties and states.

The Authority on  
COMMISSION GOVERNMENT AND THE  
“CITY MANAGER” PLAN  
Is  
The Loose Leaf Digest of Short Ballot Charters”

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